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IX. — *Discovery of the North-West Passage.* By Commander R. M'CLURE, of H.M.S. 'Investigator' (*Gold Medallist*).

Communicated by Sir GEORGE BACK, R.N.

Read November 14, 1854.

It will be remembered that among the many ships fitted out by her Majesty's Government expressly for service in the Polar Sea were the *Enterprise* and *Investigator*. Nothing that ingenuity could devise or experience suggest was omitted in order to fortify them against collision with the ice. They were equipped with a warm-air apparatus, had a large supply of extra stores, and were furnished with provisions for three years. The first was commanded by Captain Collinson, C.B., and the second by Commander Robert M'Clure; and they were ordered to proceed with all possible dispatch to Behring Strait, so as to arrive at the edge of the ice before the 1st of August. They were to bear in mind that the object of the expedition was to obtain intelligence, and to render assistance to Sir John Franklin and his companions, and not for the purposes of geographical or scientific research.

Furthermore, it was thought

"unnecessary to give you more detailed instructions which might possibly embarrass you, in a service of this description; and we have therefore only to repeat our perfect reliance in your judgment and resolution, both in doing all that is possible to relieve the missing ships and in withdrawing in time when you come to the painful conclusion that your efforts are unavailing."

The *Enterprise* and *Investigator* left Plymouth on the 20th of January, 1850; and a short trial in the rate of sailing soon convinced Commander M'Clure of the inferiority of his ship, which would consequently be left far astern in the long race before them. A week had scarcely passed when they separated in a gale of wind, and did not again meet till the *Investigator* arrived at the Straits of Magellan, where the *Enterprise* had been eight days. Having been towed through by her Majesty's ship *Gorgon*, the same result took place in the fresh start, and on reaching Honolulu, five days later than her consort, Commander M'Clure had the mortification to hear that Captain Collinson only that very morning had sailed for the North, though not without leaving full instructions for his guidance, to proceed to Cape Lisburne, and, in the event of not meeting at that rendezvous, Commander M'Clure was desired to act entirely on his own judgment,—

"which," he adds, "was the most satisfactory direction he could have left me."

Having completed his stock of provisions for three years, calculated, however, to suffice for four, he left Wahoo on July the 4th. He was aware that his commanding officer intended to attain to 170° E. longitude, and 30° N. latitude, before shaping his course up Behring Strait. To pursue the same route would only throw him further a-stern; and having accidentally gleaned the possibility of passing through the Aleutian group, or Fox Islands, he resolved, with a full knowledge of the risk, to accomplish it:—

"I made," he remarks, "a straight course from Wahoo, which I believe is not usual, but I was obliged to attempt something desperate."

Adding, "perhaps I may be under the influence of some lucky planet," which many more might have thought, had they been equally favoured; for, being under a great press of canvas, "not a studding-sail was taken in between the latitudes of 17° S. and 69° N." In fact, when his persevering commander was struggling against baffling winds near the western end of the Aleutian chain, on July 29th, M'Clure was in Kotzebue Sound:—

"It is my intention," says Captain Collinson, Sept. 13th, 1850, "to proceed

again to the north, and remain in the most eligible position for affording assistance to the Investigator, which vessel having been favoured with a surprising passage from the Sandwich Islands, was fallen in with by the *Herald* on the 31st July off Point Hope, and again on the 5th August by the *Plover* in lat. $70^{\circ} 44'$ N., and long. $159^{\circ} 52'$ W., when she was standing to the north under a press of sail, and in all probability reached the vicinity of Point Barrow fifteen days previous to the *Enterprise*, when Captain M'Clure, having the whole season before him, and animated with the determination so vividly expressed in his letter to Captain Kellett, has most likely taken the in-shore route, and I hope before this period reached Cape Bathurst, &c."

The Investigator had now gained the edge of the ice about the date prescribed in the Admiralty instructions, and with characteristic energy her commander proposed to push through the first favourable opening leading to the eastward, with a view of getting to the N. of Banks' Land, but avoiding by every possible means being drawn into the bight "to the S.E., near Boothia," which he naturally concluded would be thoroughly explored by the expedition at that time employed under Captain Austin.

His object being defined, it seemed indifferent whether his ship was forced through the pack or made a more circuitous course to arrive at a position sufficiently north, whence a choice of direction might be taken through one or more of the large channels already known to exist, and thus spread the sphere of exploration in search of the *Erebus* and *Terror* to the utmost possibility.

In our present state of uncertainty respecting the whereabouts of the *Enterprise** it is quite imaginable that Captain Collinson may have been actuated by a similar idea; and in the event of impediments of that insurmountable description conjectured by some to exist, it is devoutly to be wished that his sense of prudence will induce him to bear up for the American coast, and follow the track of his predecessor.†

"As for looking for winter quarters," says M'Clure, "it is a question that would not in the least affect my movements, so thoroughly am I convinced that a great part of the navigable season is lost by being fearful of wintering in the pack; so, wherever my onward course is stopped, there is my winter-quarters."

Deeply impressed with the risks and uncertainties before him, he exclaims: "In the event of losing my vessel through the endeavour to carry out to the utmost their Lordships' instructions, the end to be obtained will, I hope, justify the sacrifice. I have reflected on every contingency—my every exertion shall be cheerfully given—the result I leave to the great Disposer of events."

On August the 2nd, in lat. $72^{\circ} 1'$ N., long. $166^{\circ} 12'$ W., the Investigator stood into the loose ice, which soon becoming close and heavy, with no prospect of easing out, and a failing breeze, she was worked along its edge in soundings of about 25 fathoms, mud; hundreds of walrus were lying thickly huddled together on the ice, "like sheep in a fold."

For three days, until the 5th, the thick and misty weather cleared a little, and the drifting ship, steadied by a breeze, shaped a course for Wainwright Inlet, with the intention of getting between the pack and the shore; a bold measure, and fraught with danger, since the former was low and shelving, and a sudden change of wind might at any moment drive the latter against it, to the ruin of all hope.

A flat and apparently shingly beach was soon descried 2 miles off, when the weather again became quickly overcast, and obliged those on board to resort to the soundings, which varied from 14 to 73 fathoms; and in this manner, without observing the land, the Investigator rounded Point Barrow.

* Intelligence of the safe return of the *Enterprise* has since been received.

† Captain Collinson passed the winter of 1851 in lat. $71^{\circ} 35'$ N., and long. $117^{\circ} 39'$ W. Sailed again about the end of August, 1852, with the intention of getting to the eastward through Dolphin and Union Strait.

The ice being sufficiently loose and practicable for sailing, Commander M'Clure steered eastward, direct for Banks' Land; but the gleam of expectation thus encouraged was but too soon dissipated. On the 6th August the mist rolled away, and exposed a heavy and impenetrable pack, extending from S.E. round by the N. to S.W., that effectually barred further progress. It was in lat. $71^{\circ} 35' N.$, and long. $155^{\circ} 12' W.$

Not a moment was lost in hauling to the wind; and though the ice passed through looked close and white, and by no means improved by showers of rain and dusky weather, which prevailed through the night, yet, by carrying a press of sail, and striking unavoidably against rock-like masses of ice, rendering the navigation extremely critical, the ship was extricated when,—on the 7th in the afternoon, an open space of clear water was seen from the “crow's-nest.”

It was now calm enough to use the boats, and, accompanied with songs and cheers, the crew commenced towing the ship; and after 6 hours' laborious work, they reached perfectly clear water in Smith Bay.

A light air enabled them to get to Point Drew on the 8th, when Mr. Court, accompanied by Mr. Miertsching, landed, to erect a cairn, and secrete a notice of their transactions. Three Esquimaux, who had evidently watched them, approached with some timidity, and after raising their hands three times over their heads, in sign of friendship, and saluting our countrymen by “rubbing of noses,” they gave them much useful information; the most gratifying being the important fact of “an open passage along the coast, from three to five miles off;” and “that the heavy ice very seldom came in or never left the land further than at present.”

There were 10 tents, and they held communication with a party who trade at the Russian Fur Company's post. They had never seen a ship, which they called “a fast-moving island.” M'Clure remarks: “They appear to be a simple, kind people; very poor, very filthy, and to us looking exceedingly wretched.”

They had seen Pullen's boats pass last year. It was ascertained that many of the Esquimaux seen had frequently gone “from the Coppermine river to Point Barrow” (?), but “could afford no information of the missing expedition.”

Off Point Pitt the ship took the ground without injury.

“In crossing Harrison Bay the influence of the Colville River was perceptible from 12 to 14 miles, the surface of the water being of a dirty mud colour, and scarcely salt.”

August 11.—Abundance of drift-wood was seen on Jones Island; and one of the Esquimaux had a gun, with “Barnett, 1840,” on the lock.

Much difficulty was encountered in worming a zigzag course among the thick ice—often grounded, and sometimes affected by temporary currents caused by the motion of floes. And on the 14th, after having escaped many dangerous banks, the Investigator ran on a shoal 8 miles N. of Yarrow Inlet. She was obliged to be lightened, and unfortunately upset one of the boats, in which 11 casks of salt meat had been deposited.

Scarcely had they escaped from this accident when the ice set down from the northward, in such quantity as to cut off all advance, and for two days little was done beyond anchoring, weighing, and warping, even for the apparently trifling advantage of gaining two cables' length. Such wearisome work makes M'Clure exclaim, “The navigation along this part of the coast is very dangerous, the sand-banks being low and numerous.”

Lat. $70^{\circ} 30' N.$, and long. $148^{\circ} 4' W.$

Still encountering heavy ice, and often retracing their way, on the 21st August they arrived at the Pelly islands, off, and not far from the mouth of the M'Kenzie River. At the distance of 40 miles the soundings did not

exceed $3\frac{3}{4}$ fathoms, while the influence of the river stream prevailed full 10 miles further N., where the colour was similar to that of the Thames at Woolwich—was slightly brackish, with a temperature of 39° : the sea-water, 4 hours previously, being 28° .

August 24.—Some huts, tenanted by Esquimaux, were visited near Point Warren. They seemed to be a barbarous set, who disclaimed all communication with the posts of the Hudson's Bay Company, on the ground that "water" was supplied to the Indians which killed them, and that they preferred trading with those near the River Colville. With their immediate neighbours they were at enmity, and were speedily left to the enjoyment of their morose isolation.

It may be remarked, that since leaving Point Barrow, where several whales were seen, not one had made its appearance until about this time, when two or three large ones showed themselves in only 6 fathoms water.

This was within sight of Cape Bathurst, where a tribe of 300 Esquimaux had assembled for the fishing season. Their demeanour contrasted strongly with the former, for they were friendly, and took charge of despatches to be forwarded to the Admiralty. They had seen Sir John Richardson's party last year; and altogether made a favourable impression on M'Clure.

On *September 1*, they left the American coast, with a thorough conviction, "That neither the ships nor any of the crews of Sir John Franklin's expedition have ever reached its shores."

Commander M'Clure describes

"The whole of the coasts as shallow, but, with the lead, may be safely navigated, the soundings being very regular. The shoals terminate about 30 miles E. of Yarrowbrough Inlet, and water varying in breadth from 1 mile to 40 may be calculated upon along shore between the beginning of August and the 10th of September. It is more or less encumbered with ice according to the winds, which we found prevailed from N.E. to E.S.E."

The obstructions from heavy ice became annoying, and every expedient was resorted to in order to clear them.

Whales grew numerous near Franklin Bay, and an occasional bear was perceived; but all these, though interesting for the moment, yielded in importance to the gratifying appearance of high land looming in a N.E. direction, which, on nearing, was conjectured to be upwards of 1000 feet high, and was subsequently ascertained to form the S. part of Banks' Land. It was taken possession of under the name of Baring Island, and a signal-post with a notice was left in lat. $71^{\circ} 8' N.$, and long. $122^{\circ} 48' W.$

This was M'Clure's first discovery, and was further enhanced by the joyous sight of open water "for the distance of full 40 miles to the eastward."

Continuing to work the ship along the shore in variable soundings, "from nine to seventy-six fathoms"—"dark mud, yellow clay, and fine white sand"—they continued to grope their way through fog and mist, till a partial clearance exposed, within 15 miles, some fresh land, diversified by "remarkable peaks," and "some snow-covered lofty mountains." It was called Prince Albert Land, and is in lat. $72^{\circ} 1' N.$, and long. $119^{\circ} 25' W.$ It is continuous with Wollaston and Victoria Land, extending north to lat. $73^{\circ} 21' N.$, and long. $112^{\circ} 48' W.$

October 10th.—They passed two singular "rocky islets," named after H.R.H. the Princess Royal, and the wind being fair and the water tolerably clear from ice,

"all the studding-sails were set with the hope of reaching Barrow Strait, only distant about 70 miles."

The usual uncertainty of Polar navigation befell them, and their sanguine hopes were shortly destroyed by drifting masses whirling against the ship,

which was arrested and at the same time "lifted considerably" by the junction of two floes:—

"Since the 11th of last month we have been drifting in the pack—narrowly escaped destruction several times—received many severe 'nips,' and after *listing* the ship over 34° , we were on the 17th firmly frozen in (lat. $72^{\circ} 50' N.$, long. $117^{\circ} 55' W.$) for nine long months."

Exploring parties were dispatched in different directions, and on the 26th Barrow Strait was discovered in lat. $73^{\circ} 30' N.$ and long. $114^{\circ} 14' W.$, which, exclaims M'Clure, "establishes the existence of a N.W. passage."

It was not before July 14, 1851, that the Investigator was released from her icy fetters, and then her sails were only twice used, drifting at other times in the pack.

Finding every attempt to force a passage into Barrow Strait without avail, M'Clure determined on rounding the S. point of Baring Island, with a view of sailing along its western coast, and so gain an entrance into Barrow Strait by its northern extremity.

It would only be a repetition of arduous trials, skilfully met and successfully surmounted—trials, it may be said, rarely if ever surpassed in the chronology of Polar navigation, and requiring professional experience of no ordinary amount to bear up against—trials, in short, like some others of Arctic notoriety, only overcome by a more powerful aid than any derived from mere human agency—were the daily escapes of the Investigator to be faithfully followed. Thus on the 29th of August:—

"The ship was in great danger of being crushed or driven on shore by the ice coming with heavy pressure from the Polar Sea; driving her along within 100 yards of the land for half a mile, heeling her 15° , and raising her bodily 1 foot 8 inches."

Again—

"A heavy grind, which shook every mast and caused beams and decks to complain as she trembled to the violence of the shock, plainly indicated that the struggle would be short. At this moment the stream cable was carried away and several anchors drew, &c."—"I had made up my mind that in a few minutes she would be on the beach, but, as it was sloping, conceived she might still prove an asylum for the winter, and possibly be again got afloat, while, should she be crushed between those large grounded pieces, she must inevitably go down in 10 fathoms, which would be certain destruction to all. A merciful Providence interposed."

And so they went on, and on the 23rd of September ran upon a mud bank, "having 6 feet water under the bow, and 30 feet astern." The cheerless appearance of Barrow Strait, white with ice, and huge masses drifting down on them from the N., allowed little choice of action, and it required no deliberation to accept gratefully the commodious harbour on the S. side of the shoal on which they had grounded. Into it they gladly sailed, and selecting a spot securely sheltered by a projecting reef from the intruding sea-ice, they anchored in 4 fathoms water, and the same night were frozen fast. Not without feelings of deep thankfulness was it called the "Bay of Mercy." It is in lat. $74^{\circ} 6' N.$ and long. $117^{\circ} 54' W.$, from whence, according to the last accounts, the Investigator had not moved.

It is remarkable that, in 1851, they had only "five entire days" in which the sails could be used, while in 1850 about three weeks were occupied in reaching Baring Island from the W.

Also, on the 24th of May, 1851, Mr. Winniett was at his farthest eastern position, and on the 23rd of May, 1851, Lieut. Osborne had got to his farthest western point—the interval between their relative extremes being inconsiderable.

Finally, a favourable wind for moving the ice might have brought the In-

Sketch
of the Shores of
Arctic America,
to illustrate
THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORTH WEST PASSAGE,
by
Capt. R. M. Clure, of H.M.S. Investigator,
1850-1.

Track of Capt. R. M. Clure in H.M.S. Investigator

The map shows the Arctic region with latitude and longitude markings. The Bering Sea is to the west, and the Arctic Circle is marked. The track of Capt. R. M. Clure is shown in red, starting from the Bering Sea, passing through the Bering Strait, and then along the coast of North America. The map includes various geographical features such as Bering Island, the Gulf of Anadir, and the Arctic Circle. The map is titled 'Sketch of the Shores of Arctic America, to illustrate THE DISCOVERY OF THE NORTH WEST PASSAGE, by Capt. R. M. Clure, of H.M.S. Investigator, 1850-1.'

Pub^d for the Journal of the Royal Geographical Soc^y, by J. Murray.

vestigator through the only barrier that stopped her progress, and it is certainly a great triumph to geographical research that what is called the "*North-West Passage*" should have been discovered by Commander R. M'Clure and his gallant companions.

GEO. BACK.

NOTE.—Captain M'Clure and his crew left the Investigator on the 3rd June, 1853, and repaired on board the Resolute, Captain Kellett, which ship failed in getting farther than about twenty-five miles S.E. of Byam Martin Island, where she wintered; and was ultimately deserted in April, 1854, by the order of Sir Edward Belcher. Captain M'Clure finally reached England in the Phoenix steamer, Captain Inglefield, in September, 1854.

X. — *Report of a Canoe Expedition along the East Coast of Vancouver Island.* By JAMES DOUGLAS, Esq., Governor.

Communicated by the COLONIAL OFFICE. With Note on Queen Charlotte Islands.

Read February 28, 1853.

SIR,

Fort Victoria, Aug. 27, 1852.

SINCE I had last the honour of addressing you on the 22nd instant, I have carried out the project, which I have long entertained, of a canoe expedition through the Canal de Arro, and along the E. coast of Vancouver Island, for the purpose of examining the country, and of communicating with the native tribes who inhabit that part of the colony; and I will now concisely state the result of my observations in the course of that journey.

2. In our passage through the Canal de Arro we were struck with the extreme incorrectness of the maps of Vancouver Island. The line of coast is well delineated, and could be traced upon our maps as far as the promontory named Cowichin Head; but from that point all resemblance to the coast ceases: the multitude of islands forming the Arro Archipelago, which extend as far as, and terminate at, Cala Descanso, being laid down as an integral portion of Vancouver Island; whereas the true line of coast runs from 15 to 20 miles W. of its position as laid down on our maps; the intermediate space being occupied by islands, and channels of various breadths, generally navigable, but probably inconvenient for sailing vessels on account of the strong currents and frequent calms which occur in these narrow waters. A correct survey of these channels will remove the difficulties that would at present be experienced by sailing vessels navigating those straits; and should Her Majesty's Government at any time direct surveys to be made in this quarter, I think the Arro Archipelago will be found to have peculiar claims to their attention, as there is a prospect of its soon becoming the channel of a very important trade.